FIRST COMICS
DEC. $1.25
NO. 21
$1.60 CANADA
E-MAN
THE B TEAM
meets
THE GOLDEN GOPHER
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%FIRST COMICS,
1014 DAVIS STREET,
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS
60201

Dear Joe:

I lost count of how many targets you perfectly skewered in E-Man #17. I think you demolished everything that's too-cute everywhere. With one possible exception. Ahem!

Congrats — it was the best one, yet.

Marv Wolfman
Somewhere Out East

For the two of you out there who don't know, Marv is an editor/writer over at DC Comics. I won't bother telling you anymore; Marv can do his own promo work.

Dear Joe:

"Smelt Quest" was certainly your best scripting on E-Man to date, and made the issue the best so far in the First Comics run (with the possible exception of #4, of course). The concept was funny enough to begin with, but it was the pacing that made it work, and pacing is one of the toughest elements of writing to master. My only disappointment was that Elfquest didn't get nearly as many lumps as the Smurfs; stationary targets are far easier to hit, but also far less rewarding.

My real reason for writing, though, was to comment on this "Morton Pastdue" person. Joe, ol' buddy, ol' pal ... you're not planning on doing take-offs on *all* the E-Man scripters, are you ... ?

Mike W. Barr
Somewhere in
Gotham City

I don't know what you're talking about, Mike. As the indicia says, "The stories, characters and incidents mentioned in this publication are entirely fictional." Of course, our indicias have been known to contain some pretty strange comments.

Dear Joe:

ALL RIGHT! Great job on "Smelt Quest" (E-Man #17)!! An excellent way of comparing and contrasting the two popular tribes of small folk, the blue ones and the Poughkeepsie ones. You even tossed in a few other things as well, with obscure references to Cerebus and Cutey Bunny.

One question: How did Penny (Patty Smelt) end up with five-fingered hands, when all the other smelts have only four-fingered hands?

Jeff Peckham
503 Marlatt Hall
Kansas State University
Manhattan, KS 66506

Wow, what do you know? There really is an obscure reference to Cerebus and Cutey Bunny! But it was purely coincidental ... I think.

In regard to your question, **E-Man** *is a comic book for readers of all ages, so I won't go into the secondary sexual characteristics of aliens.*

Dear Mike and Joe:

I've never read an Elfquest before in my life, but I still found E-Man #17 hilarious! Joe Staton's wry, subtle (?) wit and sense of pacing surpasses Marty Pasko's sledgehammer humor by parsecs.

I must say, though, that I was kind of confused by the caption on page 4, referring to our "erstwhile marsupial."

If that was a joke, I don't get it. Isn't Teddy Q. a marsupial anymore? Or, as I suspect, does Joe need a dictionary?

Robert A. Buethe
226 Hathaway Ave.
Elmont, NY 11003

No, Joe doesn't need a dictionary; I need one. While going over Joe's original script I added the word "erstwhile" because I thought it had a snappy ring to it. And now I'm so embarrassed, I'm not going to tell you who I am.

Dear Mike and Joe:

Someone once said (in fact, I think it was me) that really effective comedy works on more than one level. In E-Man #17, Joe Staton produced one of the finest comedy/parody stories I've seen in months.

I was also impressed that you have changed and expanded the characters of Kitty Porn and Ford Fairmont. As Dave Sim did with Elrod in Cerebus, I would like to see Kitty and Ford evolve into more than one joke characters. Sharpen their personalities and they can become fine antagonists for E-Man and company.

Are there any plans for multi-part stories or back-up features in E-Man? I would like to see occasional short features with Nova and Mike Mauser.

T.E. Pouncey
Witchita, KS

Gee, T.E., the best comedy/parody story you've seen in months? I guess if you read Dave Sim's Cerebus regularly, that's actually high praise.

Funny you should mention Mauser back-up stories, because ...

NEXT MONTH: E-Man takes a break as we introduce our first limited series — **The P.I.'s!** Mike Mauser joins up with famed detective Ms. Tree when a routine divorce case turns into a bizarre murder mystery.

E-Man creator/writer/penciller **Joe Staton** teams up with **Ms. Tree** creator/writer **Max Collins** and artist **Terry Beatty** for this three-part limited series.

E-Man will be back in two months with the adventures of Captain Koala!

— Not Joe Staton

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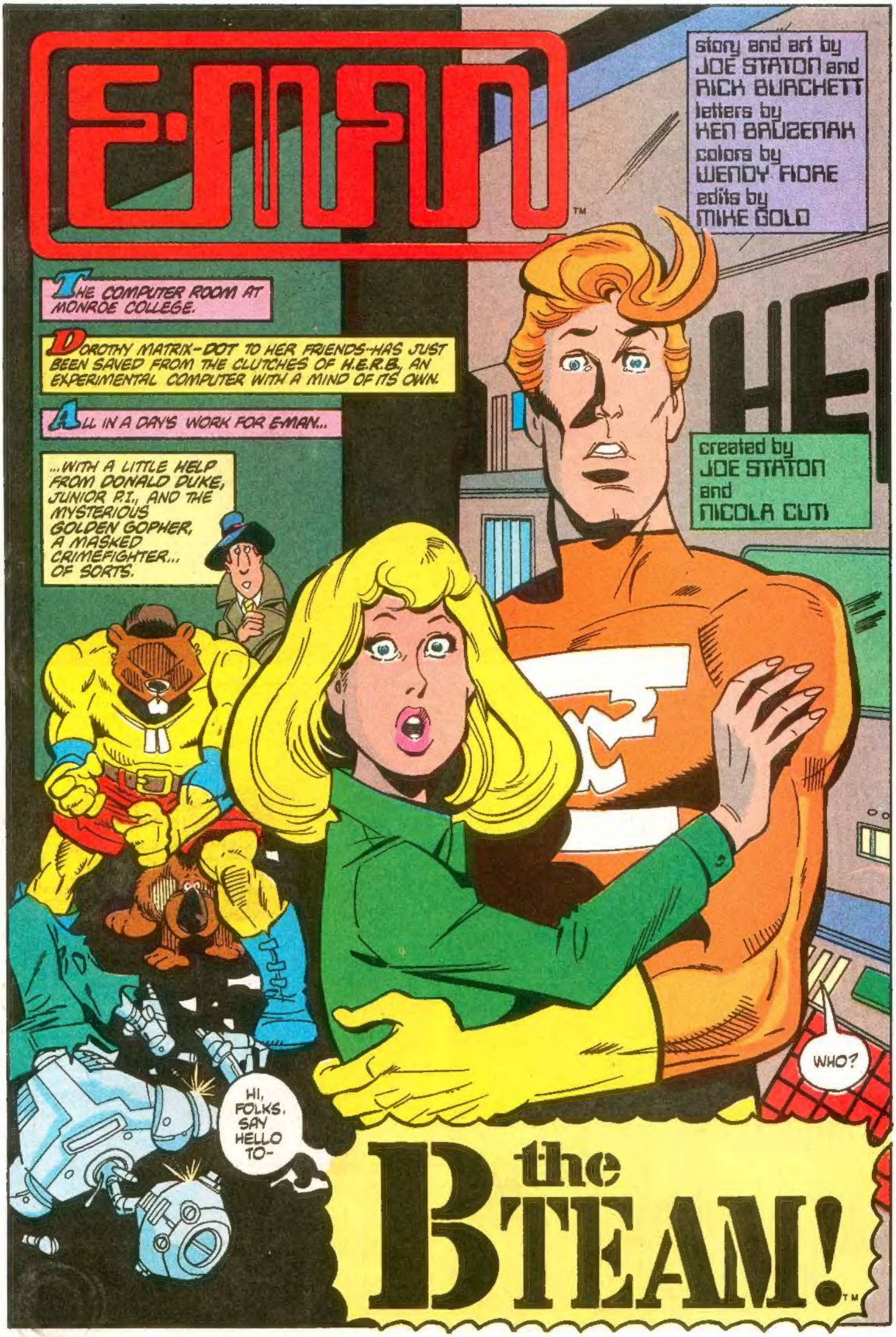
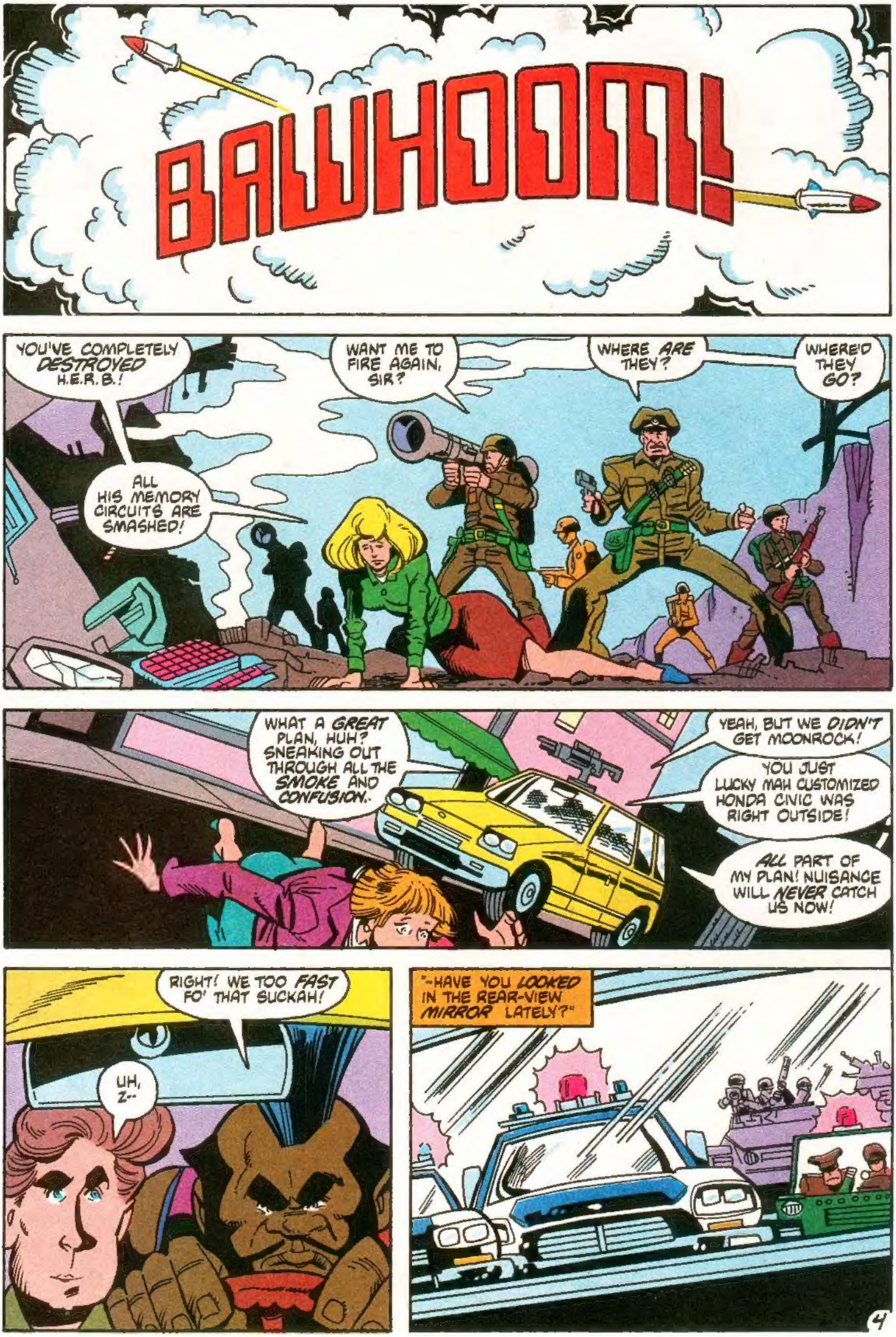
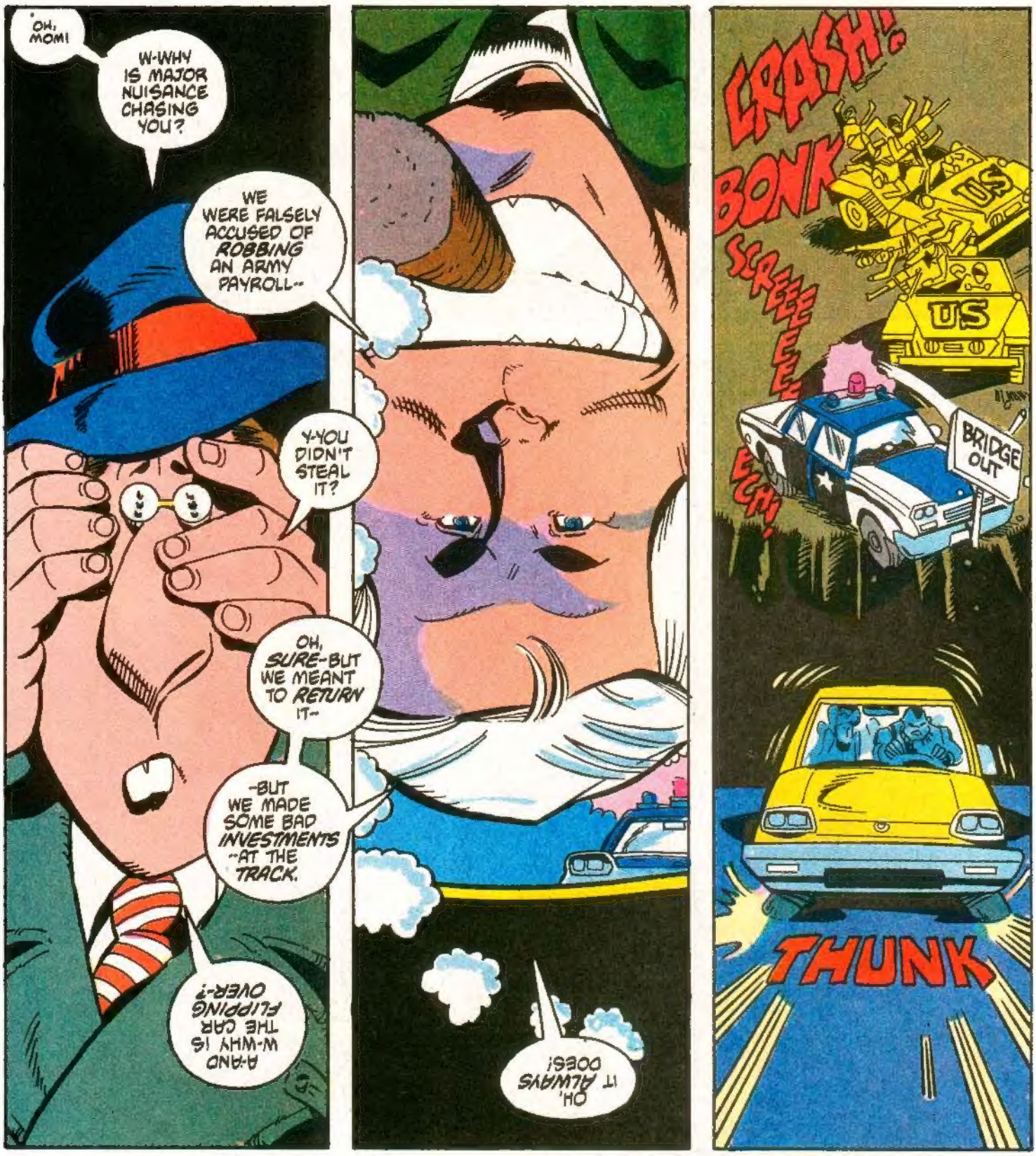

E-MAN
story and art by JOE STATON and RICK BURCHETT
letters by KEN BRUZENAK
colors by WENDY FIORE
edits by MIKE GOLD
created by JOE STATON and NICOLA CUTI
THE COMPUTER ROOM AT MONROE COLLEGE.
DOROTHY MATRIX-DOT TO HER FRIENDS-HAS JUST BEEN SAVED FROM THE CLUTCHES OF H.E.R.B., AN EXPERIMENTAL COMPUTER WITH A MIND OF ITS OWN.
ALL IN A DAY'S WORK FOR E-MAN...
...WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM DONALD DUKE, JUNIOR P.I., AND THE MYSTERIOUS GOLDEN GOPHER, A MASKED CRIMEFIGHTER... OF SORTS.
HI, FOLKS. SAY HELLO TO-
WHO?
the BTEAM!

MOONROCK, YOU FOOL, TAKE THAT CEREAL BOX OFF YO' FOOL HEAD!
NOW, MR. Z, DON'T UPSET HIM--WE NEED MOONROCK TO FLY OUR PLANE.
BESIDES, I'VE GOT A PLAN.
BUT LET'S NOT BE IMPOLITE...
I'M TAMERLANE JONES. ME AND MY COMPANIONS--MR Z, FAKE, AND BUCKY BEAVER OVER THERE--ARE THE FAMOUS IMPOSSIBLE-TO-FIND-BUT-ALWAYS-THERE-WHEN-YOU-NEED-THEM B TEAM!
GOOD JOB FINDING MOONROCK FOR US, DONALD. AS SOON AS WE FINISH THIS JOB, I'LL BE ABLE TO PAY YOU.
I'VE GOT A REALLY GREAT PLAN.
NOW, COME ALONG QUIETLY, MOONROCK.
GOPHER? B TEAM? HARVEY?
MOONROCK? I'M THE GOLDEN GOPHER! THE GOLDEN GOPHER GNAWS, BUT HE DOES NOT SWALLOW!
WHERE'S HARVEY?

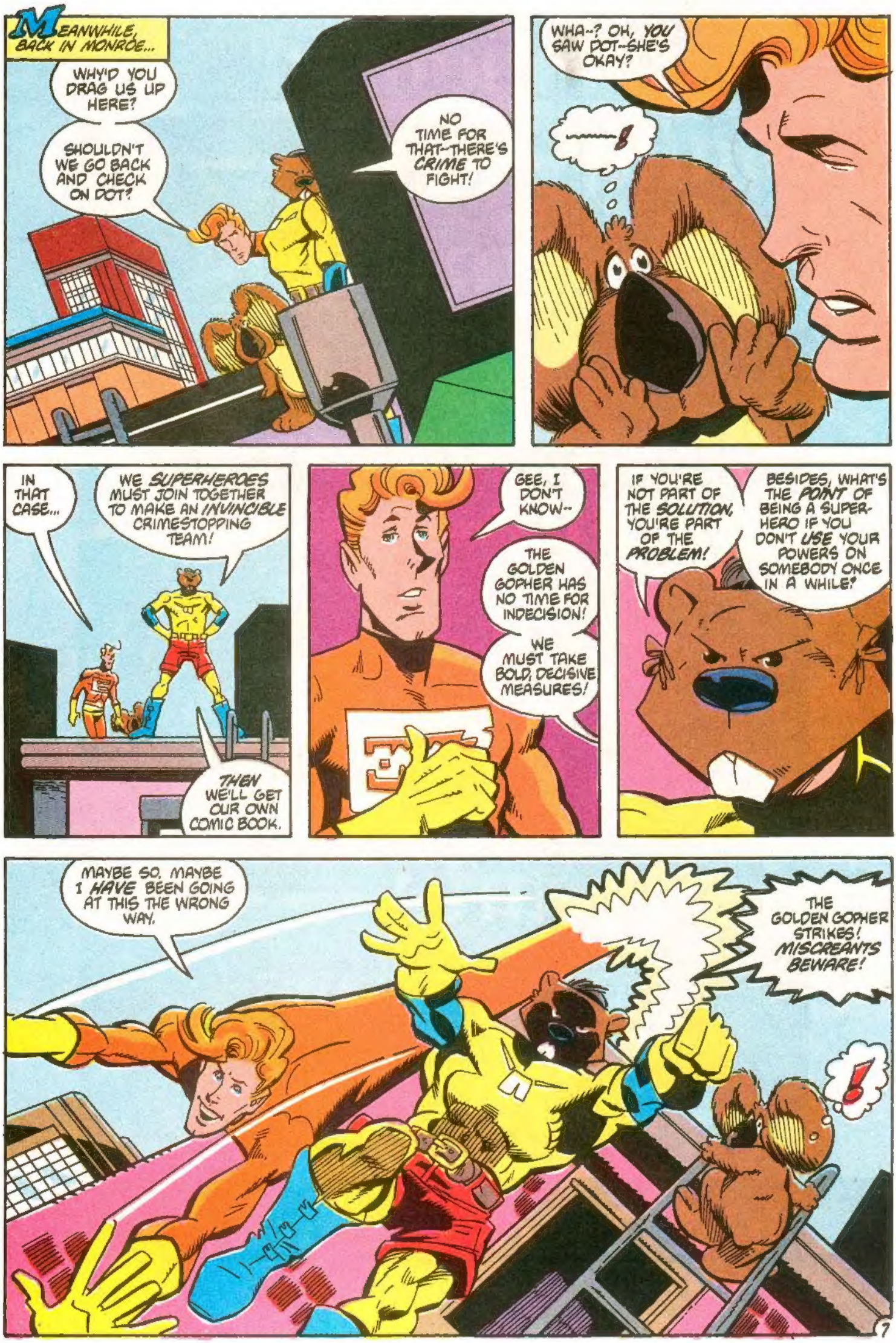
THE GOLDEN GOPHER WILL NOT BE TAKEN!
NOW, JUST WAIT A SECOND- DON'T GO RIPPING UP ANYBODY!
WHY DID YOU BREAK DOWN THE WALL?
I ALWAYS BREAK DOWN THE WALL!
TAMERLANE, LOOK OUT!
IT'S MAJOR NUISANCE!
POW
BOOM!
WHOOMBUDDA BUDDA!
YES, AND THIS TIME I'VE GOT YOU CRIMINALS!
THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK, NUISANCE!
I'LL NEVER REST UNTIL YOU'RE ALL BEHIND BARS. I BET YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE A PERMIT FOR THAT GUN.
SWOOSH
WHOOSH
I'VE GOT A PLAN
KA-BOOM!
BUDDA
BUDDA
HEY, WATCH WHERE YOU AIM THOSE THINGS! SOMEBODY COULD GET HUR--
KEERASHH!
H.E.R.B.! OH, NO!


BAWHOOM!
YOU'VE COMPLETELY DESTROYED H.E.R.B.!
ALL HIS MEMORY CIRCUITS ARE SMASHED!
WANT ME TO FIRE AGAIN, SIR?
WHERE ARE THEY?
WHERE'D THEY GO?
WHAT A GREAT PLAN, HUH? SNEAKING OUT THROUGH ALL THE SMOKE AND CONFUSION.
YEAH, BUT WE DIDN'T GET MOONROCK!
YOU JUST LUCKY MAH CUSTOMIZED HONDA CIVIC WAS RIGHT OUTSIDE!
ALL PART OF MY PLAN! NUISANCE WILL NEVER CATCH US NOW!
RIGHT! WE TOO FAST FO' THAT SUCKAH!
UH, Z--
"--HAVE YOU LOOKED IN THE REAR-VIEW MIRROR LATELY?"

WHY DOES MOONROCK THINK HE'S THE GOLDEN GOPHER?
OH, HE'S JUST A BIT ECCENTRIC-
"HE WAS READING COMIC BOOKS AT BREAKFAST..."
MINNESOTA'S GOLDEN GOPHERS SCORE AGAIN!
HOW TO INTERPRET DREAMS
"HE DROPPED HIS SPOON..."
BONK!
"AND BEFORE YOU KNOW IT, HE WAS CONVINCED HE WAS DESTINED TO PUNISH CRIME AS-"
the GOLDEN GOPHER!
WHERE'S HARVEY?
FORGET THAT FOOL MOONROCK, TAMERLANE- WE GOT A PROBLEM!
DON'T WORRY, Z- ALL PART OF MY PLAN.
BRIDGE OUT
WOOFOOOFOOO


OH, MOM!
W-WHY IS MAJOR NUISANCE CHASING YOU?
WE WERE FALSELY ACCUSED OF ROBBING AN ARMY PAYROLL--
Y-YOU DIDN'T STEAL IT?
OH, SURE-BUT WE MEANT TO RETURN IT--
-BUT WE MADE SOME BAD INVESTMENTS --AT THE TRACK.
A-AND W-WHY IS THE CAR FLIPPING OVER-?
OH, IT ALWAYS DOES!
CRASH!
BONK
SCREEEEEEE
ECH!
US
US
BRIDGE OUT
THUNK

I'LL GET YOU, JONES! I SWEAR I WILL!


MEANWHILE, BACK IN MONROE...
WHY'D YOU DRAG US UP HERE?
SHOULDN'T WE GO BACK AND CHECK ON DOT?
NO TIME FOR THAT--THERE'S CRIME TO FIGHT!
WHA--? OH, YOU SAW DOT--SHE'S OKAY?
IN THAT CASE...
WE SUPERHEROES MUST JOIN TOGETHER TO MAKE AN INVINCIBLE CRIMESTOPPING TEAM!
THEN WE'LL GET OUR OWN COMIC BOOK.
GEE, I DON'T KNOW--
THE GOLDEN GOPHER HAS NO TIME FOR INDECISION!
WE MUST TAKE BOLD, DECISIVE MEASURES!
IF YOU'RE NOT PART OF THE SOLUTION, YOU'RE PART OF THE PROBLEM!
BESIDES, WHAT'S THE POINT OF BEING A SUPER-HERO IF YOU DON'T USE YOUR POWERS ON SOMEBODY ONCE IN A WHILE?
MAYBE SO. MAYBE I HAVE BEEN GOING AT THIS THE WRONG WAY.
THE GOLDEN GOPHER STRIKES! MISCREANTS BEWARE!

LISTEN, GUYS, I HATE TO SPOIL ALL THE FUN, BUT WE GOTTA DOUBLE BACK AND GET MOONROCK.
FORGET THAT FOOL! WHAT WE NEED HIM FOR?
I TOLD YOU BEFORE- HE'S THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN FLY THE PL--
-THAT TRUCK!
DAMN FOOL PULLED RIGHT IN FRONT O' ME!
KRRUUNCH!
WHANG!
NOW LOOK WHUT THE FOOL'S DONE TO MAH CAR! I'M GONNA RIP THEIR HEADS OFF, AN'--
HEY, LOOK AT THIS--
THIS TRUCK IS FULL OF ESKIMOS --IN CHAINS!
I SAW THAT MOVIE!
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FIRST NOTES

DATA IN ACTION

Several months ago, we asked you folks to fill out a survey so we would know a little bit about you — who you are, what you like, that sort of thing. We received a whole lot of responses; in fact, we received more than twice as many as we anticipated. So the first thing we learned was not to sell you guys short.

Somewhat more recently, we published some of the results of this survey. Now you know what we know.

So what? What good is all that knowledge if nobody acts on it?

Well, next month we're releasing the first comic book influenced by that survey — just to prove we're paying attention. And all this provides a convenient segue into a sincere new comic hype.

Perhaps the one piece of information that surprised me the most was the large number of people who wanted to see a detective comic book. I guess I shouldn't be that surprised, as **Ms. Tree** has been quite successful for several years now. But since there wasn't a serious attempt to follow Ms. Tree's success, I guess I failed to see what was right in front of me all the time.

Well, for a long time now, Ms. Tree writer **Max Collins** and artist **Terry Beatty** have been talking with **Joe Staton** about doing something together. What, nobody knew for sure. Then I saw the survey results.

The proverbial light bulb went off over my head (and it's a damn shame comics artists don't do effects like that any more). Let's do — tah dah! — a limited series. Or a mini-series. Or whatever you want to call it.

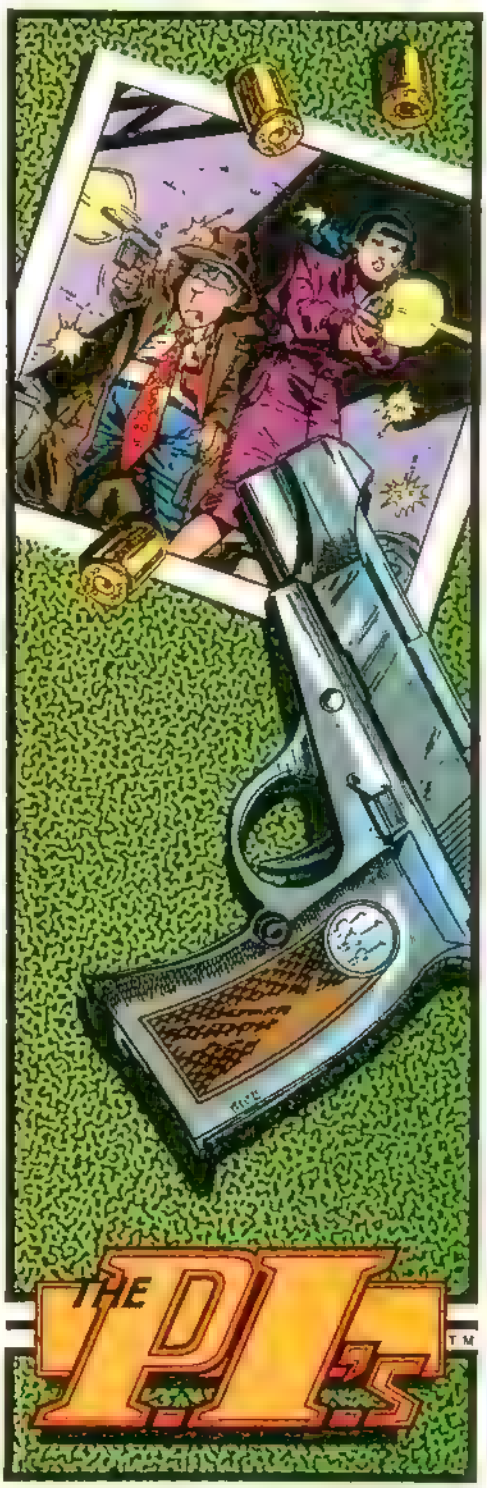
And let's team up detective Michael Mauser with Ms. Tree. Let's get Collins to write, Staton to pencil, and Beatty to ink. Sort of beauty teaming up with the beast, all in the context of a solid detective thriller.

And Collins is a natural; author of thirteen detective thrillers with two more in the can, Max is the guy the newspapers turned to when Chester Gould stopped writing Dick Tracy. The guy knows his stuff — and Ms. Tree has been in print longer than the oldest First Comics title.

Everybody was real excited; we plotted the story out and found it to work in three chapters (as opposed to deciding to do a four or a twelve issue series and then padding the story to fit the format), and we scheduled it for September.

One problem arose; how do we get **Joe Staton** to pencil this detective thriller while writing and pencilling **E-Man** and serving as First's art director? Simple: we clone him. Unfortunately, Hilarie Staton, Joe's wife, found that prospect confusing, so we decided to alternate E-Man with the Mauser/Tree series.

Then I get the call from **Mike Grell.** "You know, Mike," Mike tells me, "I really enjoyed drawing that tribute to Mickey Spillane back in Ms. Tree #7." Grell is



about as subtle as Jon Sable's Mauser. "So, I was thinking, if you're going to do a Mike Mauser/Ms. Tree mini-limited, how about . . ."

So **Mike Grell** is going to do three more tributes to Mickey Spillane, starting off with a private detective known as Mike Hammer

Hmmm . . . Michael Mauser, private investigator. Ms. Tree, private investigator. Mike Hammer, private investigator. "Let's call this series (tah-dah!) **The P.I.'s!**" What a natural!

So **The P.I.s** number one, by **Max Collins, Joe Staton,** and **Terry Beatty** — with a two-page mini-poster by **Mike Grell** — premieres next month.

And now you know how top-level management decisions are made.

— Mike Gold

FIRST IN AUGUST

American Flagg! #15 — **Howard Chaykin's** back on full script-and-art, and he's taken Reuben and Luther to the wilds of Western Canada for "Northern Lights, Double Cross!" And while he's at it, Chaykin's started up the American Flagg! dossier!

E-Man #21 — Who is the Golden Gopher? What is the B-Team? Will Teddy-Q be forced to get a Mohawk hair-do? And how did E-Man get mixed up in the biggest shootout since Stephen Cannell's latest TV pilot? **Joe Staton** will tell us in this exciting issue!

Grimjack #5 — John Gaunt rides The Eternity Road and discovers the only law in the Cynosurian outback: Jericho Noleskil! **John Ostrander** and **Timothy Truman** start a new multi-parter. And, in Munden's Bar, Truman makes his debut as a writer as he teams up with artist **Joe Staton** for the secret origin of . . . Bob the Watch Lizard!

Jon Sable, Freelance #19 — Sable's back in Africa only to find himself caught up in a deadly manhunt . . . with Jon Sable as "The Prey!" **Mike Grell** provides cover-to-cover thrills.

Starslayer #23 — **Ostrander, Truman,** and **Hilary Barta** bring us the Golden Moby and . . . the beginning of time! And the Black Flame is caught up in the ultimate confrontation with the Nightmare Lord, courtesy of **Peter Gillis** and **Don Lomax!**

WARP #18: Chaos finally makes one shady deal too many, and the end result could have a cataclysmic effect on both the Prince of Madness and his brother Cumulus! **Peter Gillis,** script; **Jerry Bingham,** pencils; and **Mike Gustovich,** inks

SO, NANOOKA, WHAT'S A NICE GIRL LIKE YOU DOING IN A PLACE LIKE THIS?
"WE WERE A PEACEFUL, QUIET PEOPLE. WE LIVED IN HARMONY WITH THE LAND--
"UNTIL THEY CAME--BLAQUE JACQUE MANAQUE AND HIS THUGS.
"THEY ENSLAVED US--
"--AND SHIPPED US SOUTH IN TRUCKS--
"--WHERE THEY FORCED US TO WORK IN A URANIUM MINE NEAR HERE..."
WELL, THAT SETTLES IT--WE'LL HAVE TO RESCUE YOUR PEOPLE!
WHY WE WANNA DO A FOOL THING LIKE THAT?
BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT WE ALWAYS DO!
AND I'VE GOT A PLAN!
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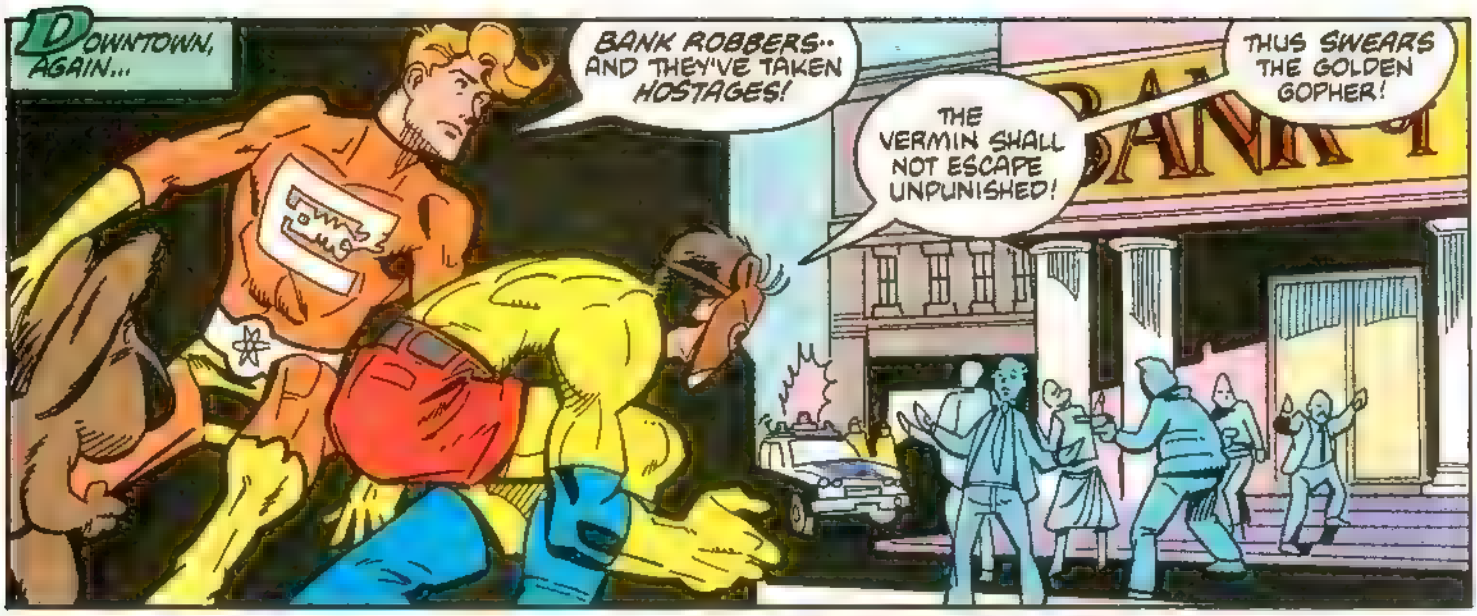
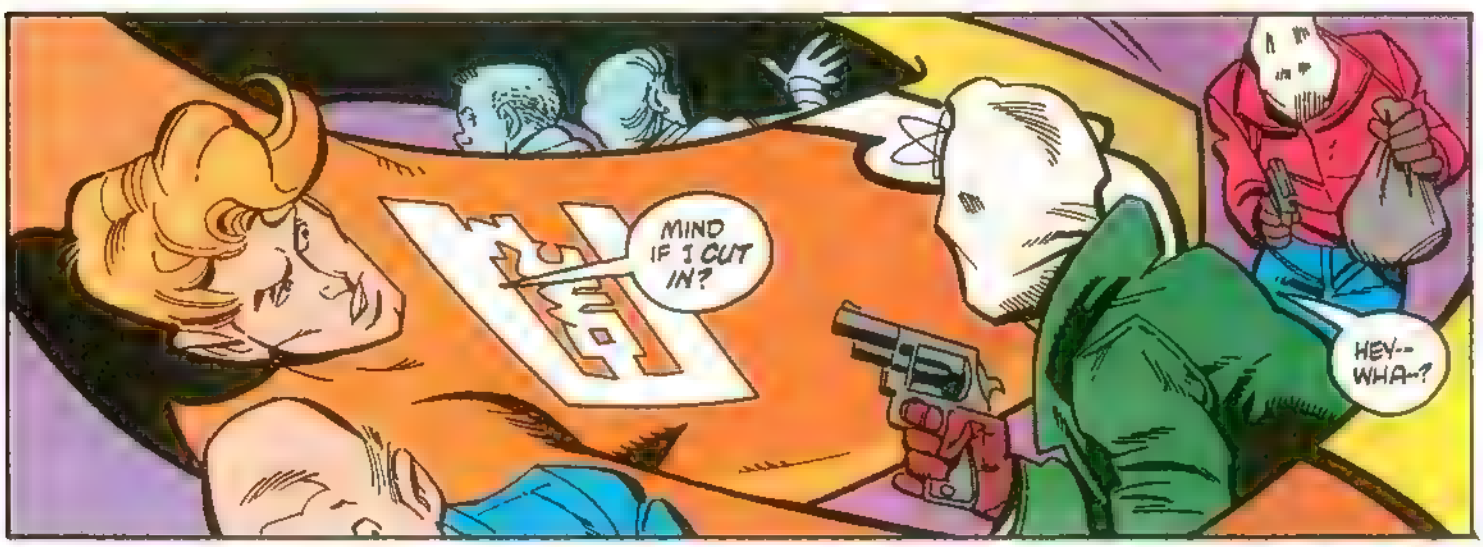
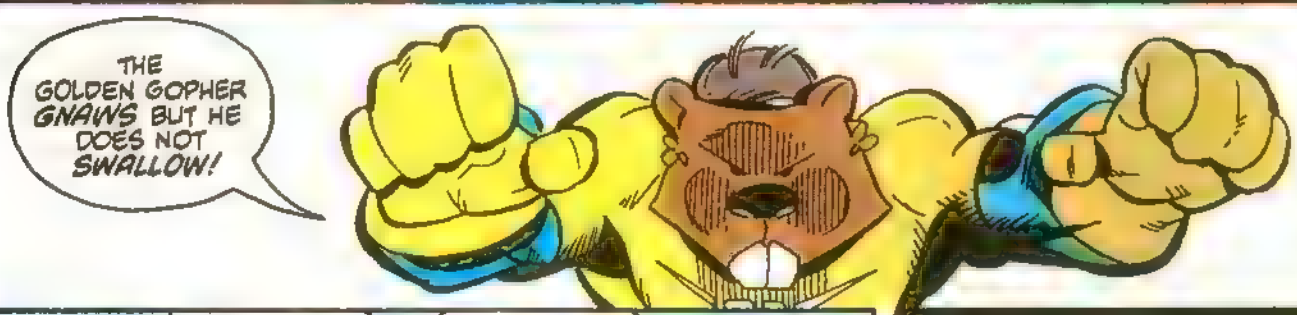
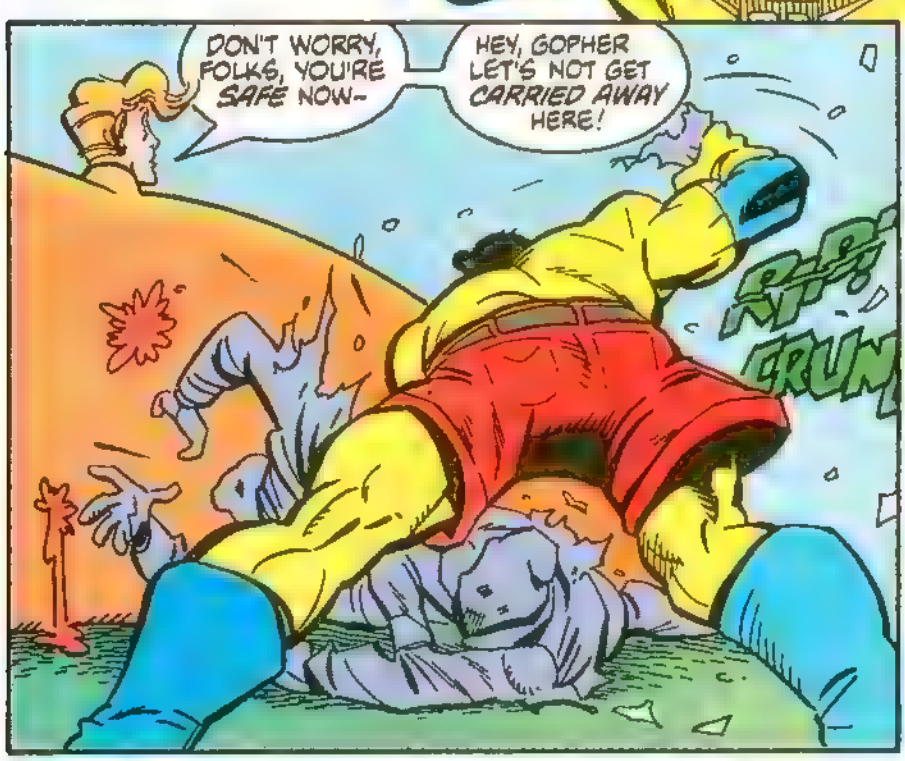

DOWNTOWN, AGAIN...
BANK ROBBERS.. AND THEY'VE TAKEN HOSTAGES!
THE VERMIN SHALL NOT ESCAPE UNPUNISHED!
THUS SWEARS THE GOLDEN GOPHER!


MIND IF I CUT IN?
HEY-- WHA--?


THE GOLDEN GOPHER GNAWS BUT HE DOES NOT SWALLOW!


DON'T WORRY, FOLKS, YOU'RE SAFE NOW-
HEY, GOPHER LET'S NOT GET CARRIED AWAY HERE!
RIP!
RIP!
CRUN

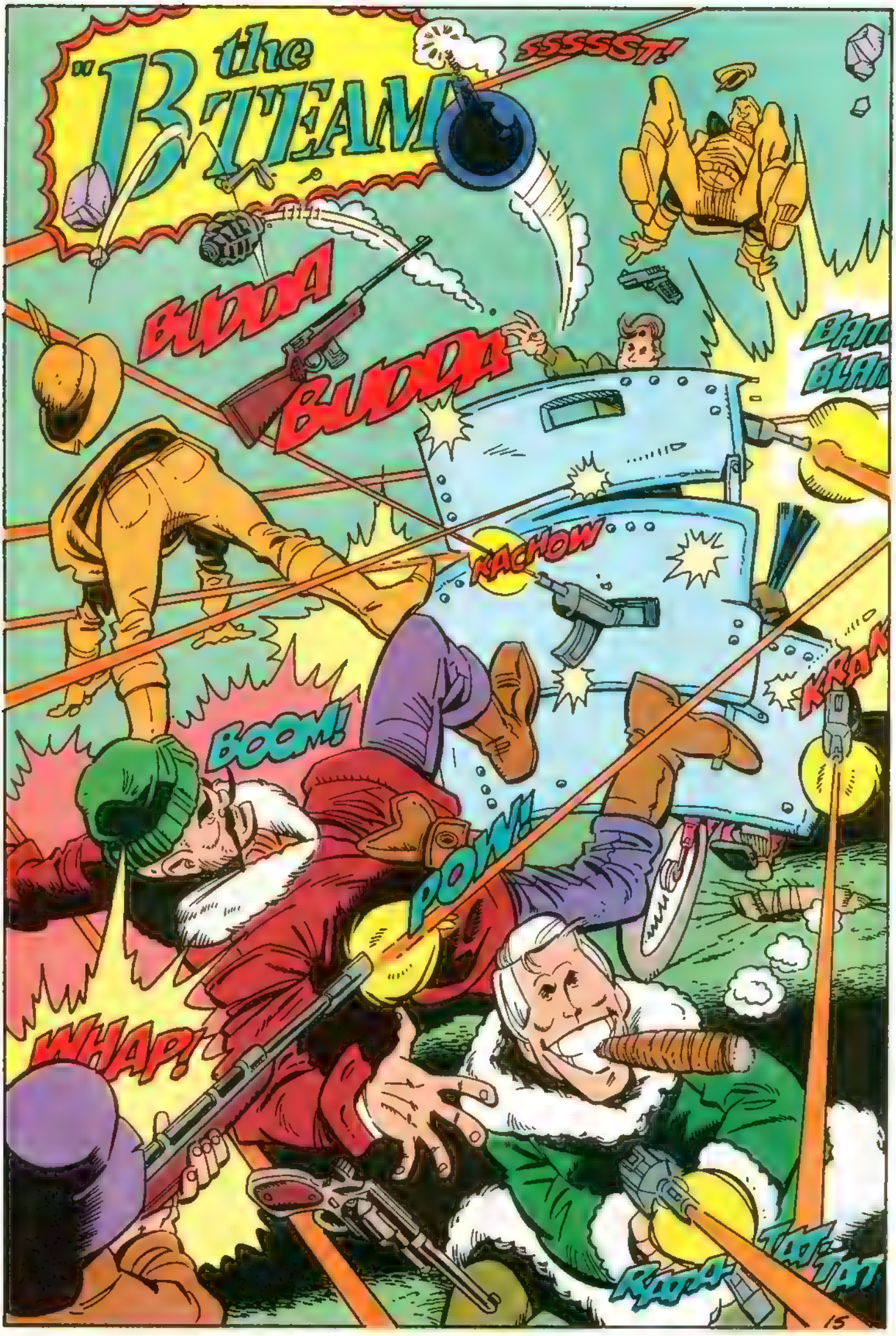
GLEEP!
SKRRCH!
KRUNCH!

TAMERLANE, THE TRUCK AND THE CIVIC ARE BOTH TOTALLED!
WE CAN'T JUST WALK UP TO THE URANIUM MINE...
DON'T WORRY- HERE'S THE PLAN...
GO GET 'IM, FAKE!
HELLO, YOUNG FELLA. WHERE'S YOUR SAFETY STICKER?
HUH!?
CAN'T RIDE A BIKE WITHOUT A SAFETY STICKER.
BUT IT JUST SO HAPPENS I'M A FEDERAL BIKE INSPECTOR, AND I'LL BE GLAD TO TAKE YOUR BIKE AND GIVE IT A COMPLETE CHECK-UP-
WHAT'S WRONG? DON'T YOU BELIEVE I'M A BIKE INSPECTOR?
THEN DO YOU BELIEVE I HAVE A BIG GUN AND A VERY LARGE, VERY MEAN BLACK PERSON STANDING BEHIND ME--?
INKSPECTOR

YOU OUGHTA BE PROUD, LITTLE SUCKAH, TO LOAN 'IM YO' BIKE! CAUSE I SAY HE'S OKAY-
AN' I'M MR. Z!
KLANG!
BRRRRRT
BONG
AN' MR. Z SAYS, IF YOU EAT LOTS O' WHEAT GERM AND BREWER'S YEAST AND WORK OUT FO'TEEN HOURS A DAY, YOU CAN BE IN THE OLYMPICS AN' WRASSLE ALLIGATORS, LIKE MR. Z!
BANGITTY BANG BANG!
VVVTT!
KLANG!
BONK!
OKAY, ALL ABOARD!
OH, WE ALWAYS FIND IT!
WHERE'D YOU FIND ALL THIS CAST IRON?
?

DID YOU REALLY HAVE TO EVISCERATE THOSE BANK ROBBERS?
THE WRATH OF THE GOLDEN GOPHER IS SWIFT AND TERRIBLE-- IF NOT TIDY!
EEEEEEEEEEEE
SCREEECH!
IT'S ALL RIGHT-- I'VE GOT YOU!
E-MAN!
I-I DIDN'T SEE HER! THANK GOD YOU-
N-NO--
ARE YOU HARVEY?
DIE, MALEFACTOR!
URK!
OH, MY GOODNESS...
?!
RRIPP
SSRSCTH!

COME, YOU STUPEED ESKIES, MOVE ALONG!
WE HAVE ZE URANIUM TO MINE!
BOAR URANIUM MINING #7
WHAT A GREAT PLAN! AS A MASTER OF DISGUISE, I CAN EASILY PASS AS ONE OF THE ESKIMOS...
...AND GET INSIDE THE HEAVILY GUARDED MINE CAMP!
COME NOW, GET ZE PICKS AND START TO DEEG-WE ARE BEHIND IN ZE QUOTA!
SORRY, BUT YOUR QUOTA'S NOT PART OF THE PLAN!
BUDDA BUDDA BUDDA
WHAT EES THEESE-!?
WHY, IT'S-
14


the "B"TEAM
SSSSST!
BUDDA
BUDDA
KACHOW
BOOM!
POW!
WHAP!
KRAK
TAT-TAT
RAT-A-

THOUGHT YOU HAD A NEAT LITTLE OPERATION HERE, DIDN'T YOU, BLACQUE JACQUE?
YOU DIDN'T COUNT ON SOMEONE COMING TO THE AID OF THESE POOR, DOWN-TRODDEN, MISTREATED BUT ESSENTIALLY GOOD PEOPLE—EVEN THOUGH THERE'S NO WAY THEY COULD EVER POSSIBLY REPAY THEIR SAVIORS!
YOU DIDN'T COUNT ON THE B TEAM!
KEEP THEM HANDS UP, SUCKAHS!

WHAT NOW?
ANOTHER LAW-BREAKER! PAY ATTENTION!
?

BUT THAT'S JUST A GUY WITH HIS DOG!
JUST LOOK AT WHAT THAT ANIMAL IS DOING! IT'S A VIOLATION OF THE HYGIENE CODE!

BLACQUE JACQUE, YOU AND YOUR GOONS BETTER START RUNNING CLEAR BACK TO THE YUKON-

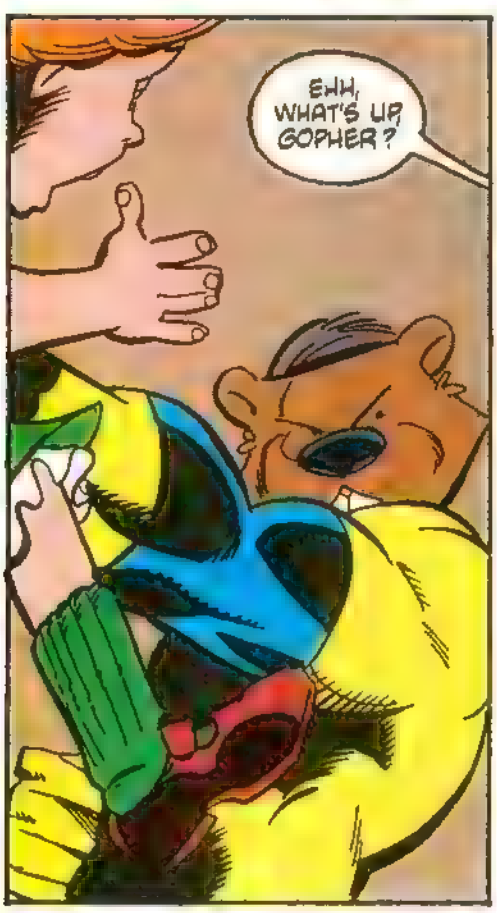
BECAUSE WE'RE BLOWING THE LID OFF YOUR LITTLE URANIUM MINE CAPER!
TNT
TNT
TNT

MEANWHILE...
HUH?
FACE THE AVENGING WRATH OF--
HEY, COOL IT, GOPHER!
THIS HAS GONE FAR ENOUGH!
BAKOOM
YOU CAN'T GO AROUND MANGLING EVERYBODY WHO BREAKS SOME LAW.
I WILL NOT LET YOU HURT THIS MAN!
HUMMMPH!
SO, I'LL GET THE DOG! HE'S THE REAL LAW-BREAKER ANYWAY!
WHAT'S THAT FLASH?
RRIP! SHRED WOOF!

GOOD LORD! AN ATOMIC EXPLOSION!
I CAN'T LET ANY OF THE FALLOUT SETTLE ON THE TOWN!
I'LL JUST ABSORB ALL THE PARTICLES-
--AND RELEASE THEM OUT HERE IN OUTER SPACE!
AND NOW I'M GOING TO FIND OUT WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS!

YOU GUYS! YOU'RE THE ONES FROM THE COMPUTER BUILDING!
WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
OH, WE JUST LIBERATED AN ESKIMO SLAVE LABOR CAMP--
-AND BLEW UP A URANIUM MINE!
HI, E-MAN!
WHAT?!? YOU COULD HAVE CONTAMINATED THE ENTIRE COUNTY!
NAH, WE NEVER REALLY HURT ANYBODY.
I THOUGHT YOU WERE LOOKING FOR MOONROCK.
AH, YES, OUR MISSING FLY-BOY. WELL, WE GOT A LITTLE -DISTRACTED. DON'T WORRY, WE'LL GET HIM!
NO--I'LL GET HIM!
YOU STAY HERE AND OUT OF TROUBLE!
THINK HE'LL GET THE FOOL?
WHO CARES! I'VE GOT A PLAN!

I BETTER FIND THE GOPHER FAST-
-BEFORE HE AND THE B TEAM MANAGE TO WIPE OUT THE WHOLE TOWN!
NO-- PLEASE DON'T HURT ME!
YOU MUST FACE THE HAND OF JUSTICE-
PEDDLING COOKIES WITHOUT A PERMIT CANNOT GO UNPUNISHED!
BY THE WAY, HAVE YOU SEEN HARVEY?
COOKIES
COOKIES
HARVEY! HE'S ALWAYS LOOKING FOR HARVEY...
HMMM...


EHH, WHAT'S UP, GOPHER?

HARVEY--!

SCAPEGOAT IN FOUR COLORS PART 4

by CHARLES MEYERSON

DOES THE COMICS INDUSTRY risk incurring the wrath of a new generation of parents, outraged that their kids are buying and reading comics less wholesome than they remember?

An article that could trigger those concerns appeared in the February 1984 issue of *Psychology Today*. Amherst professor Benjamin DeMott surveys a few of the new direct-sales comics (like the one you're reading), which do not pass through the Comics Code Authority for approval.

He refers to them as "adult comics," noting a new "frankness about sex." He offers a "guess" that most readers of "adult" comics are "dropouts and community-college students" —"young losers" who take comfort in what he calls "the gloom, the pervasive atmosphere of defeat in comics," from the oppression of *American Flagg*'s Plex to the double-crossing President in *Camelot 3000*.

Never mind that DeMott passes judgement without waiting for the story's resolution; never mind that he doesn't distinguish between direct-sales comics and regular, Code-approved newsstand titles. This is the stuff of which anti-comics crusaders are made.

DC COMICS EXECUTIVE Editor Dick Giordano says he doubts a new dark age is likely. He's not required to send any comic book through the Comics Code. But he does have his own code:

"I'm not willing to accept anything in terms of violence, sexual innuendo, strong language ... not absolutely required by the story line (or) with a view to titillation. I will permit any of those things if it's absolutely necessary to the telling of the story."

Mike Gold, First Comic's editor and a former broadcaster, may be a little more liberal. Gold would accept anything that would pass on contemporary radio — if it makes the story work.

GIORDANO SAYS DC has been trying to persuade the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA) to do something to counteract the bad press comics can get. But he believes "a trade group that has just three of 16 publishers as its members probably can not serve any real function."

Giordano would like to gather all publishers in a new organization "that might use the CMAA as its base ... so we could solve common problems — marketing problems, publicity problems."

So far, First Comics — among others — has refused to go along. Publisher Rick Obadiah says he supports the idea, but not as long as it is tied to the Comics Code, which he says has a history of censorship.

YOU WANT TO KNOW what I think?

The concept of Comics Code approval as a prerequisite for national distribution is dead. The direct-sales market now distributes comics nationwide, with or without a Code Seal.

The Code has survived primarily as a defense against criticism, so the industry can — in Giordano's words — "be able to say we pass material through the Code."

Publishers seem just to be going through the motions. Critics — like DeMott — and distributors aren't paying attention to the Code. Whether or not it was a good idea to begin with, it is almost useless now.

YET THE CODE ITSELF is a good set of guidelines for people creating comics for children. It requires that bad guys be punished and wrongs be righted; it says guns and drugs are bad; it encourages use of good grammar.

Rather than scrap it — as some critics propose — the industry could *revive* the Code.

The pressure of the 1950s is off. Publishers don't have to apply the Code to all newsstand comics. Doing that has devalued it. Publishers could apply it more selectively — to comics whose creators are willing to follow it.

Maybe the CMAA would administer a code, or maybe it would authorize its member-publishers to use the Code Seal as they see fit. But the Code need not represent censorship. Properly promoted, it could be a big help — like a "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval" for publishers hoping to persuade parents to buy children's comics for their kids.

A trade organization is just the kind of group to do that promoting.

IF COMICS ARE IN danger of some new *Seduction of the Innocent*-type crackdown, it is because the public still sees comics exclusively as — in Comics Code administrator-emeritus Len Darvin's words — "children's publications."

The industry needs to establish that comics are a medium as versatile as any other, capable of communicating with kids or adults. A well-funded joint effort to get the idea across — in TV, radio and print ads — would make the prospect of complaints about adult comics falling into kids' hands as remote as complaints about adult *books* falling into kids' hands.

For decades, mainstream bookstores have displayed children's paperbacks among more "adult" books. In almost any supermarket you will see "Peanuts" collections displayed just inches from sleaze. Why no complaints of dangerous "adult" books being sold to children?

Paperback book publishers use cover design to steer kids to the right titles — a lot of children's books use cover *borders*, where adult books' cover illustrations run off the edge. Book publishers also establish special divisions for children, such as Dell's Laurel Leaf line.

If nothing else, all that helps guide retailers. Already changes along those lines seem to be taking shape in the comics field: Marvel and DC are talking about establishing children's lines; Giordano has said he's considering establishing a separate cover format for DC's entries.

IN A LOT OF WAYS the comics industry is coming to resemble the rest of the book industry. For instance, as the "trade paperback" has become popular in the mainstream, *comics* of similar size and format have become popular as "graphic novels."

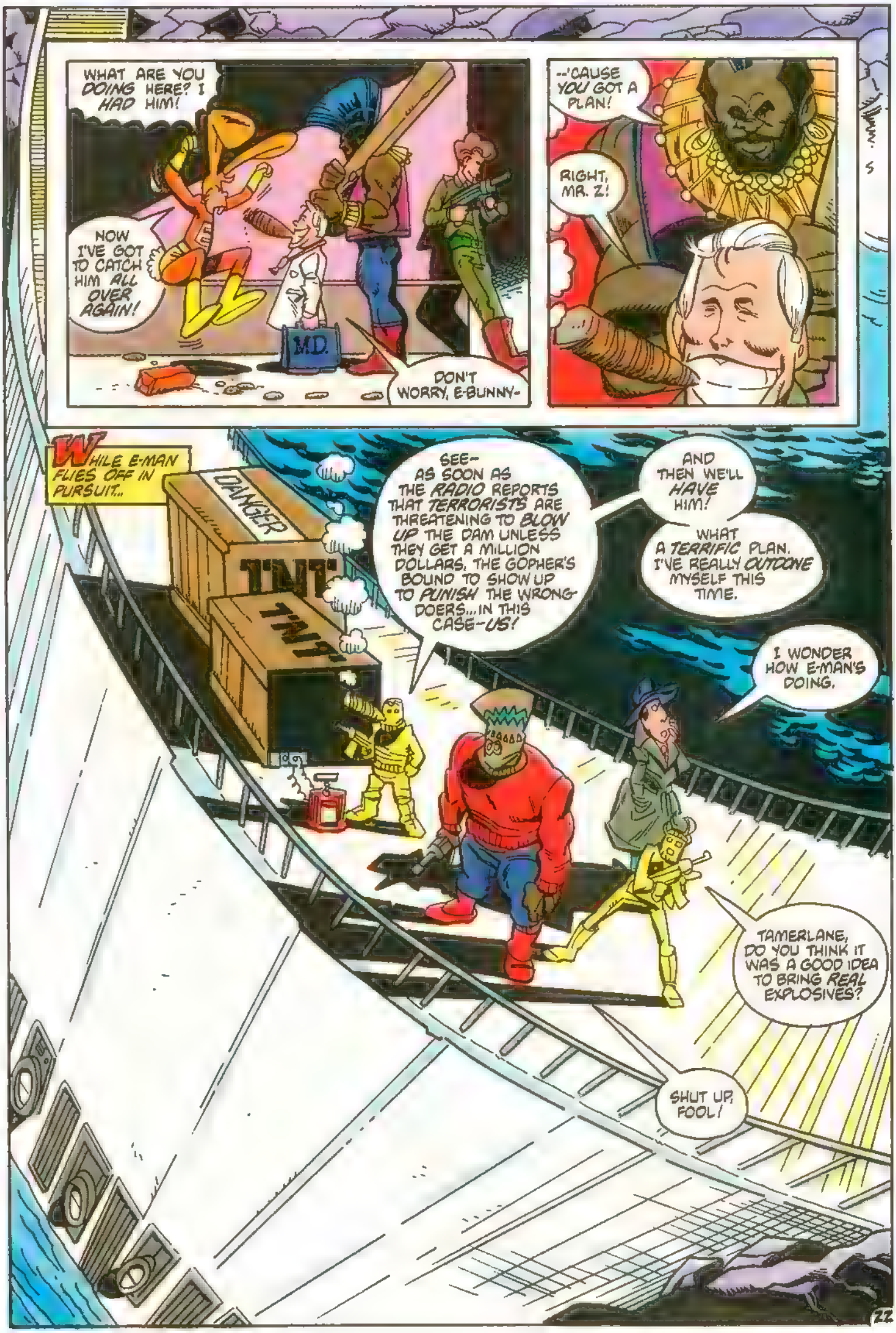
And, as *Comics Buyer's Guide* columnist Heidi MacDonald has noted, the word-balloon-and-picture format is invading the mainstream. One week the *New York Times* bestseller list included three Garfield books, Berke Breathed's *Loose Tails* and Gary Larson's *Beyond the Far Side*.

MacDonald argues — correctly, I think — that before the comics can reach maturity, they have to develop material to attract people with interests broader than capes-and-leotards. And she says they have to win respect as a medium.

On the first count, the industry's making progress. As for the second, overhauling Comics Code enforcement and establishing a strong industry-wide trade group would help.

(Broadcast newsman Charlie lives in Oak Park, Illinois with his wife, Pam and his cat, Mimsy, neither of whom is particularly fond of comics.)

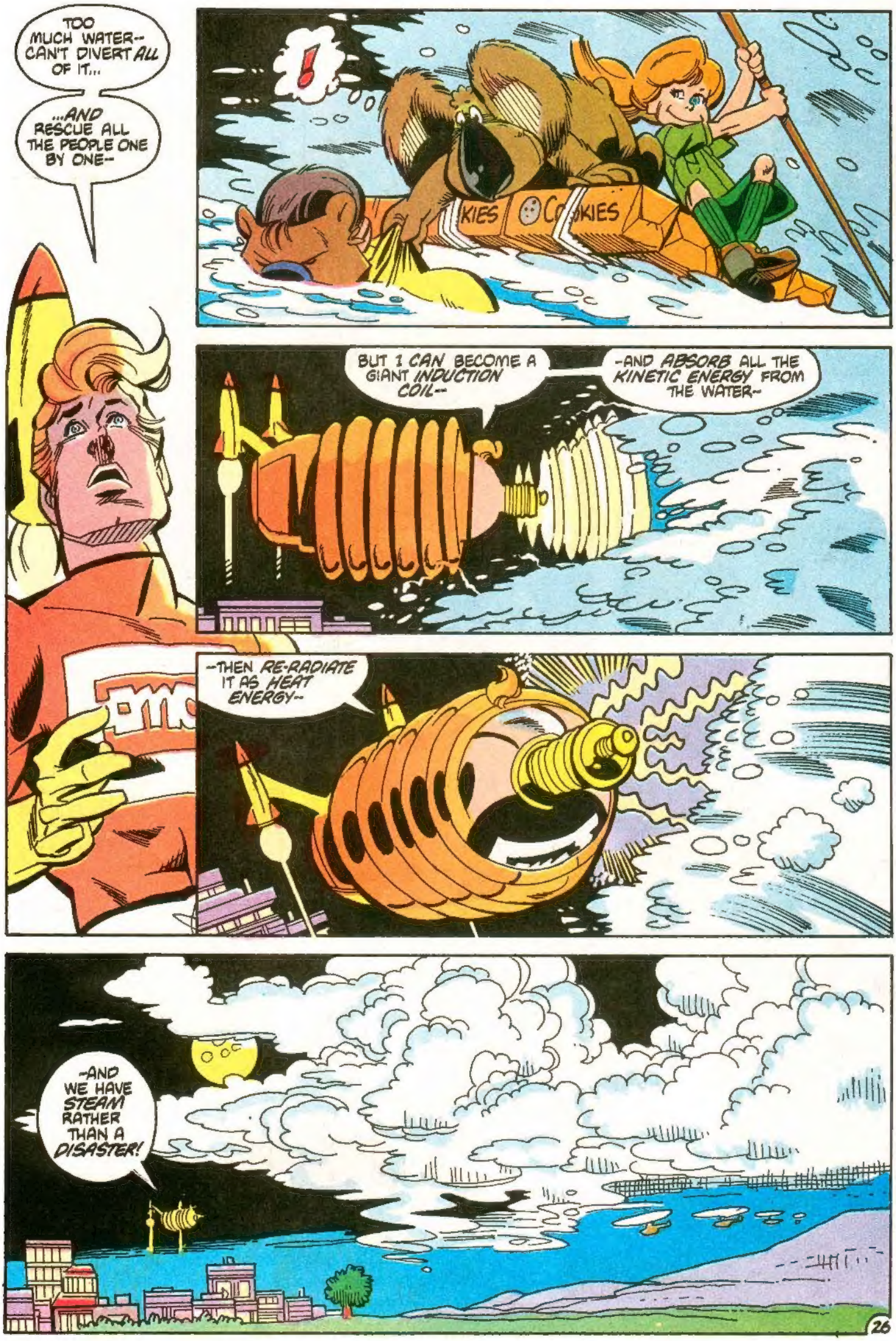
HARVEY- IS THAT *REALLY* YOU?
I *KNEW* I'D FIND YOU!
THEY TRIED TO TELL ME YOU DIDN'T *EXIST*- BUT I *KNEW* WE WERE *DESTINED* TO MEET!
NOW, THE GOLDEN GOPHER AND HIS FAITHFUL COMPANION HARVEY CAN FIGHT CRIME TOGE-
NOW, NOW, MOONROCK, SETTLE DOWN. IT'S ME, *DOCTOR GOODBRAIN*. WE'VE GOT TO GET YOU BACK TO THE *HOSPITAL* BEFORE YOU *REGRESS* ANY FURTHER!
COOKIES
BUT *I'M* THE GOLDEN-
GOLDEN *FOOL*, SUCKAH!
WHOMP
HA! *MISSED* ME!
THE GOLDEN GOPHER *CANNOT* BE TAKEN!
YEEEEEOOO
21

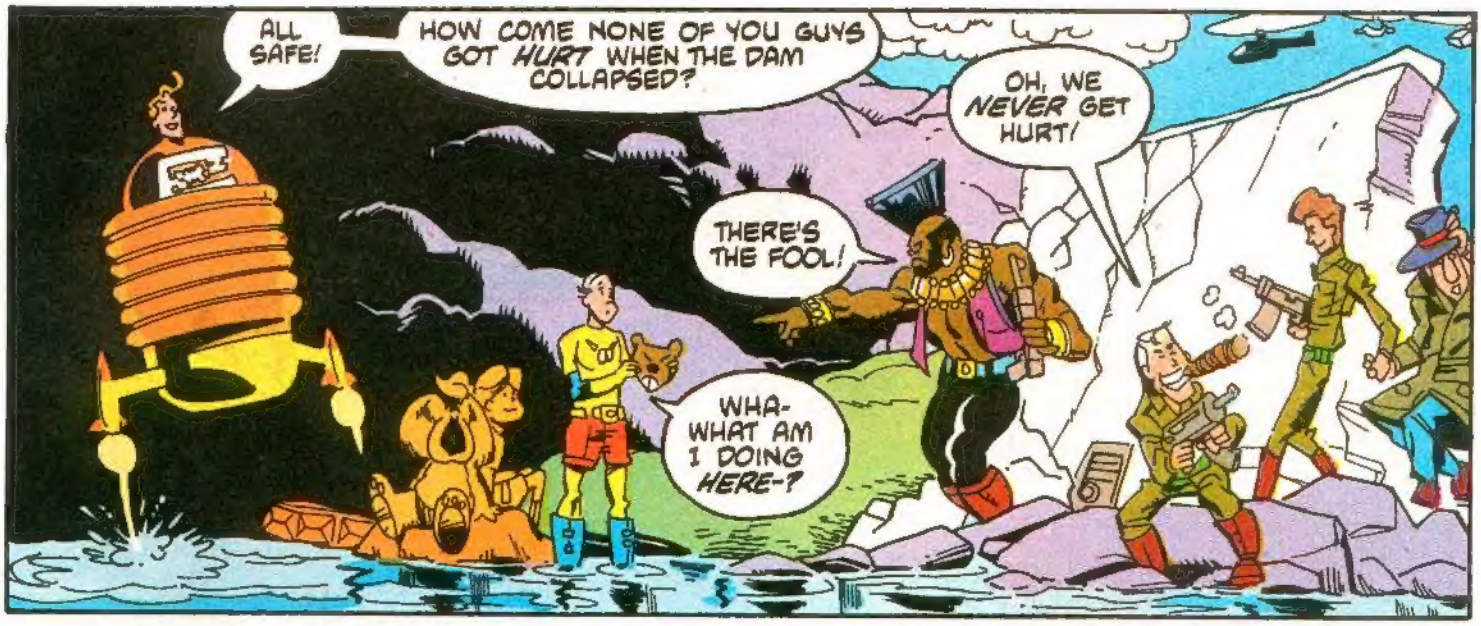

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? I HAD HIM!
NOW I'VE GOT TO CATCH HIM ALL OVER AGAIN!
M.D.
DON'T WORRY, E-BUNNY-
--'CAUSE YOU GOT A PLAN!
RIGHT, MR. Z!
WHILE E-MAN FLIES OFF IN PURSUIT...
DANGER
TNT
TNT
SEE-- AS SOON AS THE RADIO REPORTS THAT TERRORISTS ARE THREATENING TO BLOW UP THE DAM UNLESS THEY GET A MILLION DOLLARS, THE GOPHER'S BOUND TO SHOW UP TO PUNISH THE WRONG-DOERS... IN THIS CASE-US!
AND THEN WE'LL HAVE HIM!
WHAT A TERRIFIC PLAN. I'VE REALLY OUTDONE MYSELF THIS TIME.
I WONDER HOW E-MAN'S DOING.
TAMERLANE, DO YOU THINK IT WAS A GOOD IDEA TO BRING REAL EXPLOSIVES?
SHUT UP, FOOL!
22

I SHOULD SIGHT HIM SOON...
POLICE REPORT THAT TERRORISTS...
...WILL DESTROY THE DAM UNLESS ALL THEIR DEMANDS ARE MET WITHIN THE HOUR...
THOSE PATHETIC DISGUISES CAN'T FOOL ME-
U.S. ARMY
US
-THAT'S THE B TEAM-AND THIS TIME WE'RE GOING TO FINISH THE JOB!
UH-OH. I BET THIS IS ANOTHER ONE OF TAMERLANE JONES' "PLANS"!
NOTHING ESCAPES THE EVER VIGILANT GOLDEN GOPHER! SOON THOSE HOODLUMS WILL LEARN THE TRUE MEANING OF "TERROR"!

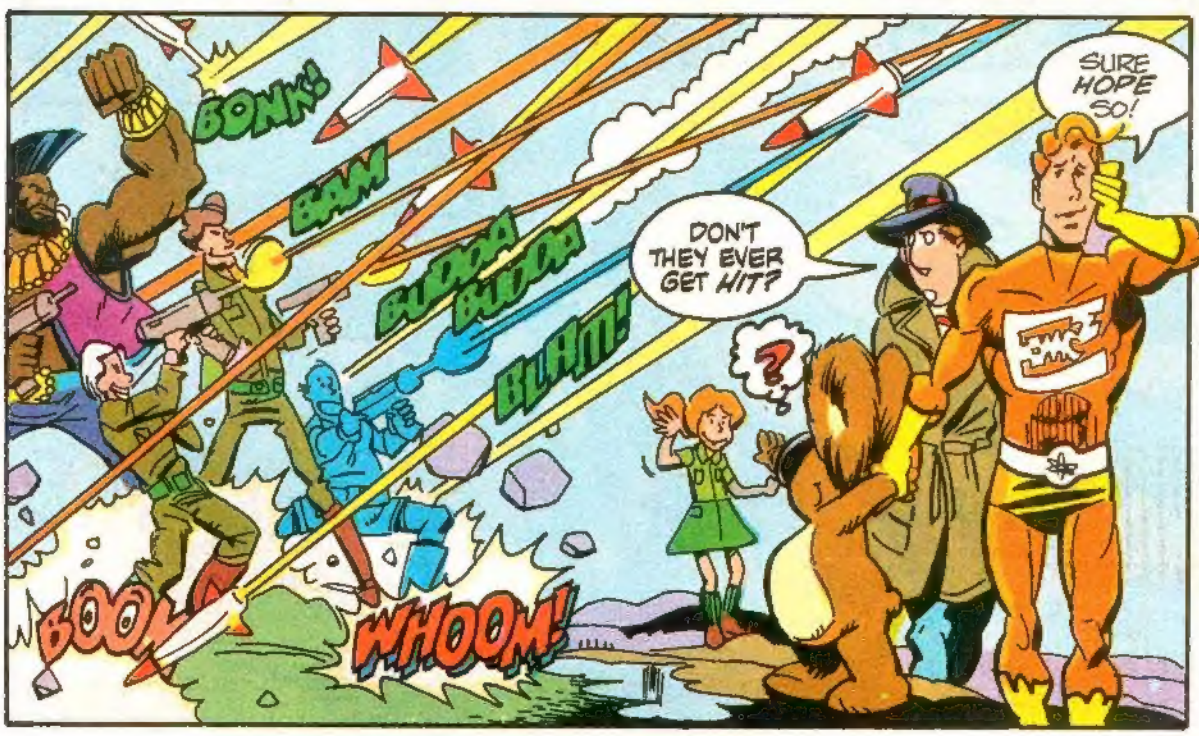
WHUP
WHUP
WHUP
TNT
TNT
UH, MR. JONES— DO YOU HEAR ANYTHING?
TAMERLANE, IT'S--
WHOOM!
MAJOR NUISANCE!
AFFIRMATIVE, YOU A.W.O.L. CONVICTS!
NOW EAT LEADEN ROCKET!
KA-CHOW CHOW CHOW
GOT MAH EARRINGS CAUGHT IN THIS FOOL MASK!
BUDDA BUDDA
KAPOW
SWOOSH
YIPE!
BLAM
TNT
24

BA
WHOOM
OH, NO! THE DAM!
WHA-? THE GOLDEN GOPHER PADDLES, BUT... HE DOES NOT SWIM!
THE TOWN IS DIRECTLY IN THE PATH OF THE FLOOD!
HARRVEYYYYY!!
KLONK!


TOO MUCH WATER-- CAN'T DIVERT ALL OF IT...
...AND RESCUE ALL THE PEOPLE ONE BY ONE--
!
KIES
KIES
BUT I CAN BECOME A GIANT INDUCTION COIL--
-AND ABSORB ALL THE KINETIC ENERGY FROM THE WATER-
--THEN RE-RADIATE IT AS HEAT ENERGY--
-AND WE HAVE STEAM RATHER THAN A DISASTER!


ALL SAFE!
HOW COME NONE OF YOU GUYS GOT *HURT* WHEN THE DAM COLLAPSED?
OH, WE *NEVER* GET HURT!
THERE'S THE FOOL!
WHA- WHAT AM I DOING *HERE*-?

NAH, WE NEED MOONROCK TO FLY A *STOLEN* PROTOTYPE OF THE *B-1 BOMBER*. WE'RE *SELLING* IT TO A TEXAS *MILLIONAIRE*!
WE GOTTA DO *SOMETHING* TO MAKE SOME *MONEY*--OUR *INSURANCE RATES* ARE *MURDER*!



NEXT MONTH

E-MAN TAKES A BREAK--AS WE BRING YOU THE FIRST IN OUR NEW MIKE MAUSER AND MS. TREE MINI-SERIES!

The P.I.'s

E-MAN RETURNS IN TWO MONTHS, WITH

CAPTAIN KOALA™

TEDDY-R'S PAGE

TEDDY HAS WANDERED AWAY FROM NOVA'S APARTMENT WITHOUT LEAVING A TRAIL OF CORN FLAKES TO FIND HIS WAY HOME. CAN YOU HELP MICHAEL MAUSER FIND TEDDY AND TAKE HIM HOME TO NOVA?